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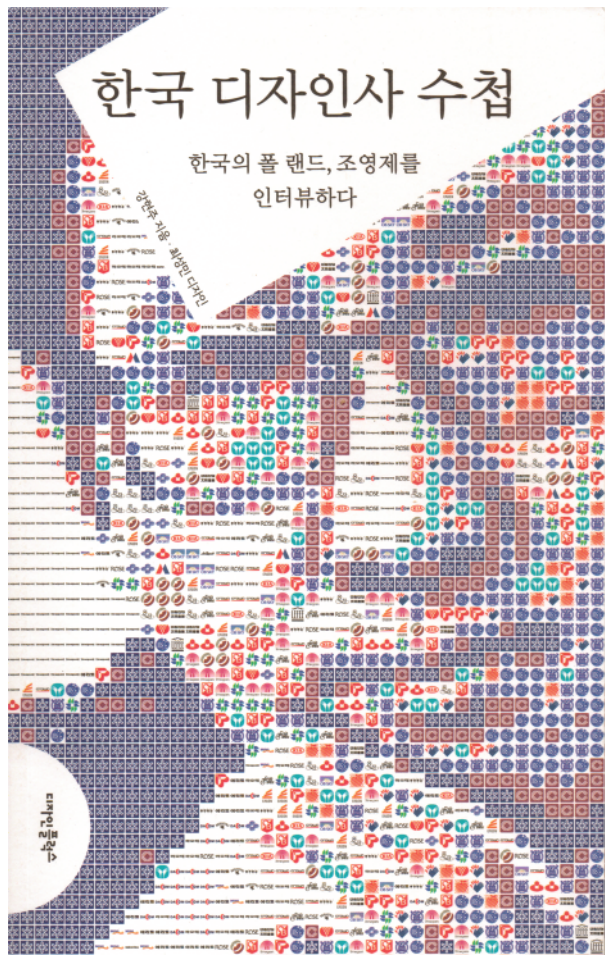


Fig 6. Hyeon-joo Kang, *Hanguk Dijainsa Sucheop: Hangukui Paul Rand, Jo Young-Jae Reul Inteovyu Hada* (Korean Design History Notebook: Interview with Young-Jae Jo, Paul Rand in Korea), Dijainpeuleoks, Seoul, 2010

Design Histories and Design Studies in East Asia: Conclusion

Yuko Kikuchi, with Yunah Lee and Wendy S. Wong

This series has attempted to give a brief overview of notable local developments in Japan (Part 1), PRC/Hong Kong/Taiwan (Part 2) and Korea (Part 3). The starting point for all three authors was the observation of a steady accumulation and development of design histories and design studies emerging from East Asia that appears to be unacknowledged and unrecognized in the Anglophone centres. The lack of engagement presents problems that are well beyond the scope of these three short essays, which, rather, introduce key developments and present something of their respective regional contexts. However, we would like to conclude with some remarks on how a productive way forward may be found, pointing the way to engagement with studies that appear to be disconnected.

Summary of observations

1. Obstacles to the development of design history

One of the biggest obstacles for developing design history studies is the lack of both resources and the actual objects themselves, due to the turbulent twentieth-century histories of Korea and China. In this context, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong are relatively better situated, but are still not comparable with Western centres. The major project in East Asia—the making of a national and regional design history—is extremely difficult, particularly in China, because of the fragmented and politically irreconcilable Republican period in Shanghai and Manchuria under Japan, the period of occupation of Taiwan as Republic of China under Japan and the colonial period of Hong Kong under Britain.

2. Recent rapid development of institutions

Despite the lack of resources, through a keen interest in design in East Asia, the region has emerged as a leader in establishing various design institutions. In Japan, pre-war institutions continue to thrive and post-war scholarly associations have been more actively developing, although it has not yet established a central archive for design, nor has the ultimate design museum been built. Meanwhile, Korea has been catching up at a fast pace since the 1990s with the consolidation of professional associations of designers and the establishment of the Hangaram Design Museum, which initiated the development of design museums in East Asia and the Modern Design Museum.⁴² In September 2011, Taiwan opened a Design Museum in Taipei. The increasing number

of new departments of visual arts in higher education is helping to develop design histories and design studies from a material culture perspective.

3. Colonial modernity and post-colonial resistance

As stated in the introduction, not only are the term ‘design’, its definition and its use in East Asia the result of colonial and post-colonial interventions, but also the framework of design histories and studies can be attributed to these interventions. They have been determined by colonial and post-colonial histories, either as an imported discipline, or as a reaction to an imported discipline. This is a key difference to the way Western design history and design study developed autonomously. The remarkable development in the 1990s of East Asian design studies also seems to be related to colonial nostalgia. Taiwan and Hong Kong are prime examples of this development. Regional design histories and design studies in East Asia have been entwined with colonial studies on cultures of the colonized and the colonizers. Some of the more visible critical issues and aspects that are characteristic of design histories and design studies in East Asia have been identified.

(a) National identity and ‘authenticity’

On the one hand, the issues of national identity and ‘authenticity’ have developed critical interest as a result of engagement with theories of ‘nation’, ‘identity’ and ‘tradition’ that have matured in Anglo-America, but the interest is also profoundly related to the regional colonial and post-colonial contexts of cultures in East Asia. The enthusiasm for the globalization of design cultures is polarized with a corresponding enthusiasm for constructing culturally specific national design identities and discourses, as suggested by location—in Japan’s case it is post-Europe and post-USA; in Korea it is post-Japan and post-USA; in Taiwan it is post-Japan, post-China and post-USA; while in Hong Kong it is post-Britain.

(b) Craft

The post-colonial consciousness in each region is also responsible for intensifying the interest in crafts. Crafts have developed through trade and cultural exchanges with the West up until recent times and, as such, are regarded as connected with indigenous roots. Studies on crafts have been often enmeshed with local conservative connoisseurship, which valorizes refined aesthetic tastes. Crafts continue to be the bedrock of national culture and occupy a highly professional domain. Even though Japan and Korea were subjected to an overwhelming process of Americanization, their crafts have persisted and remain a dominant professional field. Indeed, a key part of their view of craft is as a resistance to externally imposed cultures and values.



Fig 7. Suyu+Trans in Research Machine (ed.), *Sin-Yeoseong: Maecheo Bon Geundae Yeoseong Pungsoksa (New Women: Customs of Modern Women in Media)*, Hankyerye Newspaper Company, Seoul, 2005



Fig 8. Modern Design Museum, brochure for the inauguration exhibition, 2008

(c) *The material culture of everyday*

Reflecting a global interest on ‘everydayness’, and led by design historians trained in Anglophone centres, design is capturing interest as part of visual culture and material studies as a way of interpreting cultural meaning in ‘everyday’. It also works in constructing regionally specific cultural history and authentic identity (as noted above).

4. Regional differences

While Hong Kong is already an integrated model led by British and British trained scholars, Korea is moving in the same direction but publishes mainly in Korean language. Japan and Taiwan present an independently centralized model that predominantly adopts the Japanese design history methodology in which empirical facts inform research. In turn, this contributes to the accumulation of primary sources without much engagement of Anglophone theories. Among these regions, China’s somewhat uneven development and unquestionable ideologically charged progress render its case rather distinctive. Moreover, the design history frameworks in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong all adopt the definition of ‘modern’ as the post-industrial period (mainly in the twentieth century), and they all recognize its relation with the moment of Euroamerican/Japanese intervention that introduced the concept of ‘design’. Thus within this

group, at least, there is a common ground for engagement in general. However, China, equipped with its powerfully independent voice, adopts the last 5,000 years as a framework for China’s ‘modern’ design history. This view is supported by ancient and classic philosophy whereby it is often argued as the predecessor and origin of Western modernity⁴³ as a reaction against a discipline of Western origin. This presents an extreme example of a difference that hinders the possibility of engagement—a difference that at least needs to be understood by the Anglophone centres, regardless of the issue as to whether any concept of globalization is possible under such circumstances.

Toward our initiatives for ‘global’

Throughout this series, the authors have gathered up-to-date information on the development in each region of East Asia in order to present, at the very least, food for thought towards thinking about the ‘global’. Following the debate triggered by James Elkins’ initial question ‘Is art history global?’⁴⁴ in the context of design, the authors have been constantly reminded of the two key questions: (1) How can local studies engage with global academia? (2) What kind of framework can be made for the study of East Asian design histories that could be considered truly ‘global’? At one level, the authors have realized that the basic issue of feasibility given the paucity of materials and objects for study in each region is a significant obstacle. On another level, there is a lack of visibility of materials, as well as a lack of available translations of developed/developing studies in East Asia, within the Anglophone centres. A large part of East Asia is keenly aware of the development of design histories and design studies in Anglophone centres and continues building their national/regional frame with variations similar to the Anglophone models but with

some specific characteristic differences. But this is not reciprocated in Anglophone centres, and the result is asymmetrical relations. It is our contention that these exciting but complex developments in East Asia deserve far greater attention. The authors firmly believe in engagement and would like to work toward academic globalization by presenting the following tentative proposals.

1. Building up archival resources and objects in East Asia through cooperation

East Asian design history studies still have a long way to go, even though there has been a steady development in terms of collecting documents, objects and building archives and through the accumulation of empirical case studies. Building regional archives is largely the responsibility of local academics and practitioners. However, significant volumes of archival materials and objects related to East Asian design histories actually exist in Anglophone centres. For example, the documented record during the Allied occupation of Japan and the materials relating to Korea during the Korean War are collected in the National Archives and Records Administration in the US; similarly, other materials and objects are archived or collected in the US and elsewhere. They do not exist locally. Such documents could be loaned or copied to institutions in East Asia. This would further facilitate the development of study at the Anglophone centres. An understanding of what is required to fill the gaps in regional East Asian archives is necessary. This understanding can be easily disseminated using modern technologies, such as English-based internet discussion groups and association newsletters that have global subscriptions. As a result, Anglophone centres will be better connected with East Asia. Similarly, the location of archival material can be promoted within and between the regions of East Asia, even though there are many political obstacles that prevent the free flow of cultural exchange.

2. Strategic choice and focus on topic

It is necessary to strategically choose and focus on topics that develop regional empirical research, while also making inter-regional connections, yet still engaging with theories used in Anglophone centres—all simultaneously. The issues include the three topics identified above (national identity and authenticity, craft as post-colonial resistance, everydayness and everyday things); the transfer and adjustment of art and craft traditions into modern design, modern thoughts and aesthetic values that formulate design discourses; Westernization and modernization and the formation of design education and its nature. Among the regions, China's case is most difficult for the reasons already stated, but there seems to be a way in through the links that have already made partial engagement. For example, graphic design and studies on urban modernity in Shanghai during the Republican Period, or studies on modern material culture in North China and Manchukuo, are the most accessible topics that have some potential to be expanded into other areas of design.

3. Facilitation of networking of the 'contaminated'

Anglophone scholars may not be fully aware of the challenges that scholars in East Asia face in engaging. For most scholars and practitioners in East Asia, English is not a language that is used for daily communication, and given their teaching and administrative commitment, even for the scholars who were trained in Anglophone

centres, writing and participating in English is very much an optional activity which complicates the situation. It requires extra energy, time and willingness; consequently, many scholars are reluctant to engage this extra dimension. Additionally, in each region, there are also conservative camps with no interest in globalization, and they comfortably insulate themselves using locally developed methodologies that address the local audience. Increasingly, as neo-nationalism strengthens in the emerging affluence of East Asia, scholars no longer look to Anglophone centres for their model. However, among these strong separatists, there are handfuls of scholars in each region who believe in the importance of engagement. These people, who are described by Inaga Shigemi as 'contaminated'⁴⁵, can be found mostly in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The Anglophone centres could facilitate the networking initiative proactively through funding projects that engage further with this group. The double merit for this initiative will be not only strengthening the existing connection with the Anglophone centres, but also filling the vast gap between China and the Anglophone centres through these people's work as interlocutors.

4. Anglophone centres' strategic investment and support to promote visibility: translation

The current lack of knowledge on and the visibility of contemporary East Asia in Anglophone centres could be addressed through translation. It is beneficial for English reading audiences to understand the basic historical facts and design contexts of East Asia. Within Anglophone centres, translations of key work can provide a basis for the realization of global studies that have universal foundations and enable the development of comparative studies. Translation would also make the ideas of multiple 'differences', 'discord' and 'impenetrability' more comprehensible. Discussion that confronts and challenges the idea of 'global', while also providing materials that deepen the desire for engagement, would be encouraged. We invite more proactive initiatives for translation from Anglophone centres, and in this regard we welcome the first translation project supported by the *Journal of Design History*.⁴⁶

This series offers a glimpse of the fast developing context of design histories and design studies in East Asia. We hope it will generate further discussion on global studies that are truly global.

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